DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 958 PS 015 542

AUTHOR Campbell, Mary E.
TITLE Parenting Children from a Different Culture.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Parenting Symposium (1st, Chicago, IL, March 21-24, 1985).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adopted Children; *Adoption; Blacks; Cultural Differences; Family Influence; Family Life; *Minority Group Children; *Parenting Skills; *Racial Factors; Racial Identification; Self Concept; *Social Adjustment; Social Support Groups
IDENTIFIERS Identity Formation; *Transracial Adoption

ABSTRACT

Available research in the area of transracial adoptions is surveyed, emphasizing the programs and services which could be developed based on this accumulated knowledge. It is argued that, because of the implications for the growing number of lives involved, the area of cross cultural adoptive placements needs further research, thoughtful program development, and careful consideration by both the professionals in the field and the adoptive families. Issues discussed include children's self concept, racial identity, social adjustment, adoptive family life, identity formation, and age at time of adoption, particularly in relation to black and minority group children. Recommendations are made for helping adoptive families adjust to the cross culturally adopted child. (DST)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED264958

Presentation Title: Parenting Children From a Different Culture

Name: Mary E. Campbell

Degree: M.S.W.

Title: Assistant Professor of Social Work

Institution: Illinois State University

Address: Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Social Work, Schroeder Hall, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61761

Phone: 309-438-8668 (Dept. Office) or 309-452-4741 (Home) or 309-438-5394 (Office)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Mary E. Campbell
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 015542

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PARENTING CHILDREN FROM A DIFFERENT CULTURE

Professionals in the field of adoption are presently struggling with the issues which revolve around the adoptive placement of children across cultural boundaries. Each year for the last three years, American couples have adopted more than 5,000 children from other countries. Linkages have been developed with such countries as Korea, India, South and Central America who, because of inadequate social services and economic difficulties, have large numbers of abandoned children in need of care. As a result of the declining number of children available in the U.S., especially young, white children available for adoption and the policy which restricts the placement of black children in other than black homes, adopting couples and agencies have looked to other countries to supply children for infertile American couples. A number of the issues surrounding these cross cultural placements are quite similar to those which were raised by the National Association of Black Social Workers in 1972. The policy which NABSW developed regarding the placement of black children solely in black adoptive and foster families remains in effect. It has been estimated by Day (1979) that over fifteen thousand black children had been placed with white adoptive families by 1979. The number of cross cultural placements has already exceeded that number in a very short time and all indications are that placement of children from other countries will be responsible for a rapidly growing number of adoptive placements for years to come. Because of the implications of the large number of lives involved, this area of cross cultural adoptive placements needs further research, thoughtful program development and careful consideration by both the professionals in the field and the cross cultural adoptive families themselves. It is the intent of this paper to survey the available research which has been

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

done primarily in the area of transracial adoptions. In addition, attention will be given to the programs and services which could be developed that would reflect our accumulated knowledge in this area to date.

The issues which were at the basis of the concerns of the members of the National Association of Black Social Workers have begun to be studied. Much can be gained from an exploration of the concerns expressed for the black child placed in a white family as well as from the research which has been done in these areas. Since there is very limited research available on the relatively new field of transcultural adoptions, correlations will be drawn between them. For much like the black child of the 60's and 70's the child placed from Korea or India will always be perceived as racially and culturally different from that of his/her adoptive family. It appears in American society that members of the black race generally experience the highest degree of racial discrimination. The discrimination experienced by Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans, is really only one of differences in degree. Because of the similarities of experiences of all racial minorities in this regard the findings and research implications may be able to provide significant contributions to the overall work being done in the area of cross cultural adoptions.

Issues of Concern: Self Concept and Racial Identity

Studies which have been done on transracial adoptions have generally focused on assessing the development of the child's self concept as a result of growing up in a racially mixed family. The one issue raised by the NABSW regarding the transracially adopted black child's physical and psychological sense of oneself seems to have been studied thoroughly. Silverman and Feigelman (1975) concluded that "transracial adoption, in and of itself, does not have a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

negative impact on the adjustment of black children." (1975, p. 534.) Of equal significance for the adoption issue is the finding that adjustment problems increased as the children in the study grew older. This is related most clearly to the second concern raised by NABSW in regards to racial identity, for the child experiences greater opportunities to operate from their racial identity as they age and deal with society outside of the family unit with increasing frequency. An additional finding of this study is noteworthy in regards to future policy and program considerations. This study found that, "The older the child, (at the time of the adoption) the greater the child's maladjustment. They suggest that the deleterious consequences of delayed placement are far more serious than those of transracial adoption." (Silverman and Feigelman, 1975, p. 535.) What role does the preadoptive environment and one's racial/cultural identity have then on the child or young adult's adjustment and life experience?

One of the prime considerations of a number of the studies done on the self-esteem and racial identity of black children raised in white or black families is the age of the child under study. It appears to be possible to get a fairly accurate picture of a child's self concept at an early age. However, it appears that in order to accurately measure the need for a racial identity, the child should be experiencing a significant proportion of his/her life outside the protected environment of the family. No study to date has adequately addressed racial identity of young adults but studies by McRoy, et.al., (1982) and Gill and Jackson (1983) which will be discussed later in this paper have contributed preliminary findings in this regard. The study done by Grow and Shapiro (1975) is more typical of the focus of the work in this area. This study of 39 families was conducted shortly after placement and a follow-up was done one year later which found a "consciousness of a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

difference between transracial and inracial adoption" by a little more than half of the families. (1975, p. 15.) This in part sounds similar to the comments by parents who have adopted cross culturally and report that after a short time they no longer see their child as Korean or Indian. The concern to be raised here in this regard, however, is that although the parents may no longer see the differences, once the child leaves the family environment society at large has uniquely different perceptions with which the adolescent or young adult must be prepared in some way to cope. Only 11 of the 35 families "considered the need for black culture, identification of child with blacks, awareness of racial prejudice and discrimination" (Grow and Shapiro, 1975, p. 15) to be important when raising a black child in a white adoptive family.

In another study done by Grow and Shapiro (1974) they studied 125 families in which a black child was adopted by a white family. Sixty two percent of the children were between 5 and 9 years of age with the median age being 7.2 years. Through the administering of the California Test of Personality which measures personal and social adjustment they concluded that the success rate for transracial adoptions was "approximately the same as that of other studies that have examined conventional white infant adoptions," (1974, p. 224) i.e., a success rate of 77%. Studies such as these provide encouraging support for parents and professionals involved in this new area of cross cultural adoption. Again, however, this study, as those mentioned previously have not been able to measure the need for a racial/cultural identity or the long-range effect of the lack of one, because of the age of the population under study. This study does raise one particularly interesting finding which could be especially useful for those in the role of developing and providing services in the area of adoptions. They found that "children in placement less

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

than 5 years had lower personal and social adjustment scores on the California Test of Personality and lower evaluations from their teachers. This suggests that, although the long-range expectation for success is good, the adjustment process in these adoptions may be relatively long and require support, reinforcing the importance of continuing agency service after legal adoption." (Grow and Shapiro, 1974, p. 237.)

A study done by Zastrow (1977) utilized a comparison group which matched 41 white families who had adopted a white child with a group who had adopted a black child. The age at placement of these children in their adoptive homes is a significant factor to consider when assessing the outcome of the findings. For the children in the transracial adoption the mean age at placement was 6 months and the mean age for the placement of the white children was 3.8 months. Therefore, the follow-up was done on a population of children whose overall mean age was slightly less than 3 years. The area of anticipation of future problems was addressed with the TRA couples by a series of questions around the areas of potential problems in elementary school, employment, dating, and identity formation. Although there was concern expressed for the areas of elementary school and employment problems, the greatest areas of expressed concern were in regards to dating and identity formation. "Thirty-seven (84%) TRA couples expect problems will occur in the dating area." (Zastrow, 1977, p. 83.) "Eighteen (41%) TRA couples mentioned they thought the child will in future years experience some identity formation problems due to race. These parents appeared to be somewhat uncertain of the specific problems that may arise, but commented the TRA person may have difficulty in deciding which race to identify with, difficulty in understanding why he is subjected to discrimination, and difficulty in deciding, 'Where do I belong', and 'Who am I'." (Zastrow, 1977, p. 83.) An additional 23% of the respondents indicated

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

concern in this area but of a more vague nature.

Since there has been no conclusive research available to us in the area of the need for identity formation or on the ability of families who adopt across race or culture to assist their adopted child in his or her identity formation, this area remains speculative. In the Zastrow study, as well as others mentioned earlier, the age of the children limited possible consideration of the value of one developing an identity of themselves as a member of a race or cultural group. Zastrow, as well as others, appears to minimize the potential impact of this aspect of one's total development. Those who attempt to downplay this aspect of development focus their comments on the relative success of TRA families to produce children who are emotionally and behaviorally as well adjusted as other comparable populations. In addition it is suggested that within our society there are a wide range of groups available with which a well adjusted person can identify. This author would in no way attempt to minimize the value of a healthy self concept or of the obvious value of a family environment over that of a series of foster homes or institutional care in another country. The need for more study in the total area of identity formation, its value, how to accomplish it, and what agencies can do to support families in this process must continue to be explored. Research suggests that TRA placements are providing as good a quality adoption experience as IRA placements but is yet inconclusive in so far as a child's total development. When we consider that over 5,000 children a year are being placed cross culturally, the magnitude of the issue becomes quite apparent. If combined efforts on the part of adoption agencies and adoptive parents can result in the young adult having a good self concept AND a pride and understanding of their culture and history, along with ways to deal with societal discrimination, it appears that their chances of a successful adoption would be increased.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In order to deal specifically with the issue of adoptive parents' ability to assist in the development of a child's racial identity, McRoy, et.al., (1982) studied a group of children who were at least 10 years of age and had been in their adoptive placements for more than two years. The comparison groups they chose for their study were thirty white families who had adopted black children, and thirty black children raised in black families. Both groups of children scored equally well on the Tennessee Self Concept Scale. However, using the responses of the children on the Twenty Statements Test, differences were found that were statistically significant between the two groups regarding their racial background and racial identity. This study concluded that so much of the child's sense of racial identity was a reflection of the way in which their adoptive families identified them and dealt with their racial heritage. "If the family acknowledged that racial identity was important and that their child was black, the child, in turn, tended to define himself or herself as black and to feel positively about that." (McRoy, 1982, p. 525.) Residing in racially integrated neighborhoods and availability of positive black role models as well as the families' value on the importance of a racial identity seemed to be the behaviors which were reflected in the child's attitude toward their racial identity. From this study one could imply that just as in the development of a child's self concept, the parents and family of a black child hold the key to his or her identification as a member of a specific race or cultural group.

In a follow-up of the British Adoption Project, Gill and Jackson (1983) interviewed both the parents and the children who were between the ages of 13 and 15 about the adoptive experience. This is the third follow-up in this longitudinal study and hopefully it will be done again when this group reaches adulthood. The group of children in this study were all placed at a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

very young age and were found at follow-up to be an integral part of their adopted family with a healthy self concept. This study, through its direct interviews with the children again raised the same concern identified in studies mentioned earlier. "When analyzing issues related to racial background we found that the large majority of parents had made only limited or very limited attempts to give their children a sense of racial pride and awareness of their racial origin. The children in turn saw themselves as 'white' in all but skin color and had little knowledge or experience of their counterparts growing up in the black community." (1983, p. 130.) Though this lack of accurate racial identity did not appear to be causing any problems for the adolescents, the authors raise the question of their future when they will leave the sheltered family and community environment and begin the process of establishing their own families and employment opportunities. As a reflection of their concerns in this area the authors recommend that agencies exert a considerable effort toward the development of quality black adoptive homes for black children when at all possible. Likewise the authors expressed concern about the potential problems in the area of development of a racial identity. They, therefore, recommended that work be done with transracial families "to enable the black child to establish and maintain contact with the black community and to develop a real sense of his own racial identity and heritage." (Gill and Jackson, 1983, p. 139.) Although studies such as this one were done specifically with black children, the findings have clear implications for the work that needs to be done in creating viable families who are capable of producing a child who has a healthy self concept and identifies with their own racial/cultural heritage.

Cross Cultural Considerations

The following two studies provide some understanding of the specific

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

issues involved in cross cultural adoption. Although the sample of the first study is small, it compares U.S. born children and Korean born children who were living in adoptive families. The Open Door Society of Connecticut conducted a survey and found that parents of Korean born children reported a much higher incidence of problematic symptoms. A further analysis of the findings by Hovey found that "two determining factors became very evident: the age of the child at placement and the number of placements the child had experienced prior to his adoptive home. The ability of these two conditions to affect a child's adjustment transcends all cultural and racial differences." (Hovey, 1982, p. 6.) Silverman and Feigelman's (1981) study supported this conclusion in that it too found that a child's maladjustment score was higher, the older they were at the time of adoption. The study by Kim (1979) of 21 Korean children adopted by white couples reported on the preliminary part of a longitudinal study looking at the adjustment and behavior of the children. Although a fairly high incidence of behavioral symptoms was reported it is unclear as to whether or not much of this was really related more to the age of the child (mean age = 5 years, 2 months) than to the effect of cross cultural adoption. It is interesting to note, however, in regards to racial identity formation, that in the interview with the 15 parent couples, "two couples anticipated no difficulty and three others never thought about" (Kim, 1979, p. 423) social difficulties, such as dating, for their child. These findings do not conclude that older children should not be placed for adoption nor that children should not be placed transracially or cross culturally. However, the knowledge and insight provided by these cumulative findings should be considered heavily when adoption policies and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

practices are developed and evaluated.

Adoption Services of the 80's and Beyond

There is little doubt that the direction of adoption services will continue to be in the area of cross cultural placements. Will the screening procedures used on white families for white children adequately evaluate the couples who want to choose a child from a different culture? Will the love and nurturing found in a healthy family environment be sufficient to facilitate the child's development of a cultural identity? Will the parents' ability to create a relationship which supports bonding also enable the child to relate effectively in a society in which people of other races and cultures are treated as second class citizens? Can any work be done with other countries to impress on them the need for children to be permanently placed as soon as possible? What can be done in our own country to impress on the foster care system the damage that occurs to a child with each recurring move?

Throughout this paper there is a major emphasis on the critical role of a child's development of a sense of their own racial or cultural identity. The following recommendations for service providers are an outgrowth of the issues raised in the studies. Families who are being considered for a cross cultural placement need to be brought to terms with the fact that their family unit will always be perceived as interracial. They need to understand that regardless of their ability to see beyond their child's racial differences, to see the child as their own, the society at large will always interact with their son or daughter as a Black American or a Korean American. Therefore, they need to be prepared, possibly in a group adoption process, to create a life experience for their child that will foster their coping skills. Couples

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

preparing for an adoptive placement need to realistically consider what possible changes they can make in their life style to accommodate greater opportunities for their child to interact with others of their own race or to observe positive racial role models. Some families may not be willing to make such accommodations as moving to an integrated neighborhood or placing a child in an integrated school. However, they need to be made aware that they are responsible for developing sufficient opportunities for the child to develop a sense of him or herself as black or Korean or Indian. McRoy, (et.al., 1982) suggests that adoption agencies "investigate not only the prospective family but also the total racial milieu in which the child will be socialized." (P. 526.) Not all couples who would make nurturing parents for a white child should be considered acceptable for the placement of a child of a different race. Agency personnel, with the assistance of the research that has been done to date, need to establish specific policy that will assist a worker in evaluating the qualifications of applicants for transracial adoptions. Parents will need help in performing at the level of identifying enough similarities with the child that bonding can occur, while also pointing to the racial uniquenesses and the pride they should take in those differences.

Grieving Loss

For children who are brought into this country for the purpose of adoption it is quite likely their life experience will be enhanced as a result. But for all these children there is a loss which must be grieved. For very young infants, of course, the loss may be quite minimal. For many of the others who arrive at age 4 or 7 a need exists for them to work through their

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

loss with their new family or with other children in a group experience. 'Culture shock' may be somewhat delayed as the child works very hard to adapt to their new environment. The loss of looking like every one around you, of food and smells with whihh you relate and take pleasure, of games and songs that were your past, all must be processed in some way. Many families will need help from the adoption worker to understand what the child is experiencing and encourage the sharing of these feelings. The most important loss for many of these children has been a significant person or persons in their lives, whether that be a birth parent they remember or a child care worker or foster parent. They do not understand why those faces and those feelings are lost to them forever and for many they may experience guilt feelings and disloyalty. The child may experience this loss through a deep grieving or sadness or through acting out and anger. Because all of this may be occurring while the child is without sufficient language skills to communicate effectively with their new family, help may be needed from an outside source.

Support for Adoptive Families

Unfortunately for many adoption agencies, as well as for the families, services essentially terminate once the adoption is finalized. Of course, most agencies will provide some form of individual or family counseling if there is a serious problem which threatens disruption. The literature and the research reported on here identifies a critical need for ongoing support from service providers throughout the life experience of the child and their family. Special need has been identified for services at key developmental stages of

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the child and also of the family, times when issues specifically related to their cross cultural adoption may create additional stresses on the normal developmental issues. Group experiences for children who can gain support from their peers has been found to be an especially useful technique around many such issues. Peer support for a child who is grieving, feeling 'different', experiencing rejection by classmates, struggling with identity issues, could provide a supplement to the work being done by the family. The same approach for a group experience for the parents of these children could provide peer support that validates them as good parents, encourages them to continue to work on instilling racial pride in their children while providing them with creative ideas that have been done successfully by other families. Much can be done with prospective adoptive families in a group experience to develop an awareness for ongoing work in a number of areas to assist their new son or daughter from Central America in developing a healthy self concept and racial identity. However, so much more could be done, and when considering the results of the research to date, must be done ongoingly by agencies responsible for the initial placement. As an ongoing positive support system, agencies can link families up prior to the adoption with their local or state wide OURS group who offer a multitude of programs, literature, community linkages and cross cultural friendships which can assist the family and their new member to see their culture as a very positive and ongoing part of their lives. The OURS organization even produces a bimonthly magazine which provides many opportunities for children to discuss their past and their feelings as well as to see pictures of many people who share their racial features.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Conclusion

An estimated 5,000 children are adopted cross culturally each year in the U.S. The long-range impact of the decision in the 60's to place children transracially has not yet been fully researched. Sufficient research has been done, however, on transracial adoptions, as well as a few studies on cross cultural placements, to establish some guidelines around which future policy can be designed and current services can be developed. The two key concerns which were raised by the NABSW in 1972 regarding a TRA child's self concept and racial identity have continued to be the central issues in TRA and cross cultural adoption consideration. Consistently the findings indicate that black children raised in white families score as high on tests which measure self-esteem as do white children adopted into white homes. In addition, black children adopted by white families score as well as all white adopted children on success of adoptive placements. Essentially it appears from the findings that a loving, nurturing family environment is able to overcome racial or cultural differences and produce emotionally healthy children who feel good about themselves.

Where children have been in placement for a number of years and racial identity is measurable, the research findings raise serious concern about the TRA child as not seeing themselves as other than 'white'. Possibly as a result of the parents' perception of the child as one of the family, little conscious effort has been reported on the part of the white families to provide an environment in which the TRA child could be exposed to positive racial role models and in which the child could experience pride in their

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

racial or cultural uniqueness. A surprising number of parents interviewed in several studies expressed limited, if any concern, over their child's future experiences in dating, employment and general societal discrimination. Proportionately the issue of cross cultural adoptions is greater because of the potentially large number of children available, although the degree of societal discrimination may be less for them than for Black Americans. The cumulative findings of the research in this area identifies a major deficiency in the adoptive families' role of facilitating the child's development of a strong racial/cultural identity. If adoption agencies are going to assume the role of placing children from Korea, India and South America in white adoptive families they must be called upon to assume responsibility for ongoing services to families and children. Providing group experiences to parents and children at key developmental stages, as well as support of ongoing networks for cross cultural families and community events could raise the consciousness level of families of the need to include the child's racial identity as part of their total development. If adoption agencies can assume the overall responsibility for creating a framework for cross cultural families that can supplement and enrich their efforts throughout the total development of the cross culturally adopted child, it appears likely that the child would be able to develop not only a positive self concept but a strong cultural identity, along with skills and strengths which will enable them to cope effectively in the broader society.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

REFERENCES

Day, D. (1979). "The Adoption of Black Children," Lexington, Mass.: D. C., Heath & Co.

Gill, O. & Jackson, B. (1983). Adoption & Race, St. Martin's Press, Inc.

Grow, L. & Shapiro, D. (1974). "Black Children, White Parents," Child Welfare League of America.

Grow, L. & Shapiro, D. (1975). "Transracial Adoption Today," Child Welfare League of America.

Hovey, C. (1982). "Children at Risk: Adjustment Problems of Adopted Children," Open Door Society of Connecticut.

Howard, A. & Royse, D. & Skerl, J. (1977). "Transracial Adoption: The Black Community Perspective." Social Work Jr., May, pp. 184-189.

Kim, S. & Hong, S. & Kim, B. (1979). "Adoption of Korean Children by New York Area Couples: A Preliminary Study," Child Welfare Jr., July/August, pp. 419-427.

McRoy, R. & Zurcher, L. & Lauderdale, M. & Anderson, R. (1982). "Self-Esteem and Racial Identity in Transracial and Inracial Adoptees," Social Work Jr., November, pp. 522-526.

Silverman, A. & Feigelman, W. (1981). "The Adjustment of Black Children Adopted by White Families," Social Casework Jr., November, pp. 529-536.

Zastrow, C. (1977). Outcome of Black Children - White Parents Transracial Adoptions, R. & E. Research Associates, Inc.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE